

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-10

LAB-06 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 DOTE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 L-03 NSC-10 PA-03 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15 AID-20

EUR-25 NIC-01 OPR-02 RSR-01 /149 W

----- 036402

R 081335Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6071

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, IN

SUBJ: LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS STRIKE

REF: NEW DELHI 6410

1. STRIKE BEGUN AUGUST 1 BY SOME 4,000 LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS (SECOND IN THREE MONTHS) NOW SERIOUSLY DISRUPTING MOVEMENT OF PASSENGERS, COAL SUPPLIES AND FOODGRAINS IN MOST PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. RAILWAY MINISTER MISHRA INFORMED PARLIAMENT AUGUST 7, NON-SUBURBAN PASSENGER AND TOTAL FREIGHT SERVICES CUT 25 PERCENT AND 35 PERCENT RESPECTIVELY. THE STRIKE, ORGANIZED BY THE ALL-INDIA LOCO RUNNING STAFF ASSOCIATION (AILRSA), ESSENTIALLY OVER DEMAND FOR (CRAFT) UNION RECOGNITION INDEPENDENT OF THE TWO DOMINANT INDUSTRIAL RAIL UNIONS WITH WHICH THE GOI NOW DEALS, THE CONGRESS (R)-ORIENTED NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN RAILWAYMEN (NFIR) AND THE SOCIALIST-ORIENTED AND THE OLDER ALL-INDIA RAILWAYMEN'S FEDERATION (AIRF). CURRENT STRIKE ESSENTIALLY OVER "VICTIMIZATION" AND ARRESTS OF PARTICIPANTS IN LOCO DRIVER STRIKE LAST MAY, AS WELL AS UNION

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RECOGNITION AND MINOR ECONOMIC DEMANDS.

2. MOSCOW-LINE CPI, INDEPENDENT-CPM AND SOME HINDU COMMUNALIST JANA SANGH LEADERS, IN COMPETITION WITH EACH OTHER FOR TRADE UNION SUPPORT, ENCOURAGING STRIKERS. DESPITE THE SIX-MONTH BAN ON STRIKES BY THE IMPOSITION OF DEFENCE OF INDIA RULES (DIR) ON MAY 26, THE STRIKE REMAINS EFFECTIVE.

3. RAILWAY MINISTER MISHRA HAS SET AUGUST 8, 8:00 P.M. AS DEADLINE FOR WITHDRAWAL OF STRIKE, PROMISING NEGOTIATIONS ON DEMANDS TO COMMENCE WITHIN FIVE DAYS AND RELEASE OF ABOUT 400 WORKERS. ARRESTS ARE CONTINUING.

4. MEANWHILE, BOTH MAJOR RECOGNIZED RAIL FEDERATIONS MAKING STRONG EFFORTS TO KEEP TRAINS RUNNING AND HEAD OFF SPREAD OF STRIKE AMONG MEMBERS. ALSO, ALL INDIA RAILWAYMEN'S FEDERATION (AIRF) HAS "POSTPONED" NATIONAL RAIL STRIKE THREATENED TO BEGIN AUGUST 27 FOR A NEED-BASED MINIMUM WAGE, BONUS AND IMPROVED SERVICE CONDITIONS. CONGRESS(R)-ALIGNED NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN RAILWAYMEN (NFIR) EXPECTED TO TAKE SIMILAR DE FACTO POSITION THOUGH NOT ANNOUNCED. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS FROM LEADERS BOTH MAJOR FEDERATIONS THEY HAVE INFORMAL ASSURANCES FROM GOI OF SETTLEMENT THEY BELIEVE MEMBERSHIP WILL ACCEPT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 AUG 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: elyme
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973NEWDE09226
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730851/aaaabldi.tel
Line Count: 85
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 73 NEW DELHI 6410
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: elyme
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 DEC 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19-Dec-2001 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <09-Jan-2002 by elyme>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS STRIKE
TAGS: ELAB, IN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005